

**Biodiversity Conservation & Economic Growth
(BCEG) Project**

**Report
on the Institutional Development
of the Ecotourism Initiative Groups
in the Pilot Regions of the BCEG Project**

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Bulgaria Biodiversity Conservation and Economic Growth Project

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Acronyms

ARD	Associates in Rural Development, Inc.
BCEG	Biodiversity Conservation and Economic Growth Project
GEF	Global Environment Facility (note the acronym “GEF” is also generically in Bulgaria for the USAID/GEF Biodiversity project)
MOEW	Ministry of Environment and Waters
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NNPS	National Nature Protection Service (of MOEW)
NP	National Park
PMU	Project Management Unit
UD/FLAG	University of Delaware/Firm Level Assistance Group
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Preface

The Biodiversity Conservation and Economic Growth (BCEG) Project is funded by the United States Agency for International Development, (USAID), as part of its strategic support to the Republic of Bulgaria. The Project is sponsored by USAID in conjunction with the Government of Bulgaria – the Ministry of Environment and Waters (MOEW). The Project is governed by a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the two governments, and its implementation covers the period: May 2000 – March 2003.

This Project is a logical evolution of earlier USAID assistance to biodiversity conservation in the country. It follows some 10 years of assessment, technical assistance and financing of Bulgaria's biodiversity conservation strategic development, new protected areas legislation, and new national park institutions. The Project is designed to capitalize on the achievements of the Bulgaria Global Environmental Facility (GEF) Biodiversity Project (implemented during the period June 1995-April 2000), and builds on lessons learned.

The BCEG Project addresses six specific contract themes known as tasks or “contract result packages”. The BCEG Project includes the finalization and implementation of two national park management plans, the development of a new management plan for Rila Monastery Nature Park. It assists in the development of financial mechanisms and strategies to ensure the solvency of national parks. The Project pilots economic growth activities with select target groups around two Bulgarian national parks. And it continues to build on the principles of strong public information and awareness as stepping stones for informed public engagement and promotion of biodiversity conservation and protected area management activities.

This Project is issued as a Task Order (Contract Number LAG-I-00-99-00013-00) under the USAID Global Biodiversity and Forestry Indefinite Quantities Contract (IQC); and is implemented on behalf of USAID by Associates in Rural Development, (ARD) Inc., of Burlington, Vermont, USA.

The Project is implemented through a Project Management Unit (PMU) based in Sofia, and includes a Team Leader, three Bulgarian technical specialists, and support staff. Project activities are coordinated through two mechanisms –

- a) Project Coordination Group – serves as a steering committee for Project planning and monitors implementation. This consists of the National Nature Protection Service of the MOEW, and national park directors, the PMU and USAID;
- b) Project Counterpart Team – PMU staff working with MOEW/NNPS counterparts.

The Project is largely implemented through the Directorates for Rila and Central Balkan National Parks. Additional technical assistance is provided by Bulgarian and international consultants, and is based on specific terms of reference.

1.0 Executive Summary

During the last year and a half Central Balkan and Rila National Parks have engaged in a pilot project with the objective of creating business opportunities for local entrepreneurs offering eco-tourism services. This work is part of a larger initiative to implement the management plans of Rila and Central Balkan National Parks with the assistance of the Biodiversity Conservation and Economic Growth Project (BCEG) supported by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

The pilot project uses the *competitive cluster* approach to develop an operational model of eco-tourism destination development. This model involves institutional development of local eco-tourism associations, inventory of the existing local eco-tourism resources, market study, development and marketing of new products, strategic planning for eco-tourism development, business planning, development of a destination business concept, and development of indicators to measure success and impact. *This paper documents the progress of eco-tourism initiative groups in two pilot areas and institutionalization of eco-tourism associations in these same areas.*

The management plans for Rila and Central Balkan National Parks include programs and mechanisms for partnerships with local communities for the development of tourist services inside and outside the parks. The partnerships are based on *a vision of eco-tourism* as a practical opportunity to combine interests of the local population, opportunities for local economic development, and nature protection through environmentally friendly activities.

The pilot project included two regions based upon a preliminary situation analysis: Samokov municipality near Rila National Park, including the town of Samokov and the villages of Beli Iskar, Mala Tsurkva and Govedarts; and, the town of Kalofer in the municipality of Karlovo near Central Balkan National Park.

The Directorates of Rila and Central Balkan National Park coordinated the partnerships with local communities. The interest, motivation, and respect of these individuals within their communities were significant factors in the success of the project.

A professional facilitator assisted in building relationships between communities and the parks. Through a process of consensus building around mutual interests, the facilitator played a key role in creating a collaborative working environment and a set of strategic plans that guided group activities.

We describe in detail *the development of “initiative groups”* within the pilot project communities. Each group passed through discernable phases of group dynamics: formation, conflict resolution, and action planning.

Leaders of the initiative groups included entrepreneurs in the area of tourism (hotel managers, restaurant managers, mountain guides, transport services), representatives of the national parks, and other local authorities. This diverse participation was valuable as it presented a variety of stakeholder viewpoints and objectives.

The pilot project included a variety of *activities that catalyzed the development of initiative groups* – joint planning, joint study of park-base resources and visitor opportunities; and assessments of local community options for eco-tourism outside the parks. It also included, preparation of work products, and a study tour to the US. In particular, the initiative groups benefited greatly from their collaborative work on special events for the National Parks – in Rila the opening of the entrance infrastructure at Maliovitza in September of 2001, and in Central Balkan the celebration of the 10th anniversary of the park in October of the same year.

Building upon their experiences working together, the initiative groups in both regions decided to *institutionalize their established partnerships* through formation and legal registration of eco-tourism associations as non-governmental organizations with permission for profit-making activities. Their structures include an annual General Assembly and Management Council. The associations provide a clear identity for their members before the larger public and local government, and offer the opportunity for development of collaborative business strategies.

The initiative groups, which developed into eco-tourism associations, were the *main mechanism for development of an eco-tourism model and encouragement of wide public interest in the philosophy and practice of eco-tourism*. The initiative groups were essential for business strategy and institutional development. Furthermore, the initiative groups played a significant role in *the genesis of a community vision for economic development* – eco-tourism gained acceptance as an alternative opportunity for job creation, income generation, a focus for new businesses, and an important theme for local authorities.

The results of the pilot project elevated the importance of eco-tourism to Bulgaria's national parks and their surrounding communities. Eco-tourism is becoming a genuine opportunity for local economic development. Looking ahead, continued efforts by business, parks administration, civil society, and local authorities will yield further growth in this field. Key steps for the future include: formalizing participation of national parks in eco-tourism initiatives through their management plans and special cooperative agreements; development of strong eco-tourism institutions; and, regional strategies for eco-tourism that capitalize on additional sites, services and traditions from surrounding areas.

2.0 Introduction

2.1 The Role of the Biodiversity Conservation and Economic Growth Project in the Pilot Program on Ecotourism

The Biodiversity Conservation and Economic Growth Project (BCEG) is an important part of a ten-year program of nature protection and management of protected areas in Bulgaria, funded by the US Government.

One of the Project's objectives is the *development of models for economic growth in the municipalities surrounding the national parks*, based on sustainable utilization of natural resources.

With changes to Bulgarian legislation and passage of the Protected Areas Law, that provide opportunities for ecotourism development, *Bulgaria has been implementing new methods of protected areas management based on cooperation with the surrounding communities*. Ecotourism is a practical opportunity to combine local community interests, economic development prospects, and nature protection programs.

The BCEG Project's pilot ecotourism program worked with the Rila and Central Balkan National Parks to develop support for partnerships in ecotourism. Programs to support these efforts have been incorporated into the management plans of the two national parks.

The main goal of the pilot project was to create business opportunities for local entrepreneurs involved in providing tourism services related to the national parks. *The project objective* is to improve the current socio-economic situation in selected municipalities and enhance links to, and maintenance of, the national parks.

The pilot ecotourism program supports the actions of the Rila and Central Balkan National Parks in their efforts to establish partnerships with local communities with a view of the overall development of tourist activities inside and outside the parks. Following a preliminary assessment, two pilot regions were selected, one for each national park. For Rila this was the Samokov municipality, including the towns of Samokov and the villages of Beli Iskar, Mala Tsurkva and Govedartsı. For the Central Balkan the municipality of Karlovo was selected, with the town of Kalofer as a center.

Management staff of the national parks coordinated this effort. They were the public face of the project and the key people who gained the cooperation of the local communities. They began the project through public discussions of the parks' management plans, and subsequently monitored the overall implementation of the model and process development.

Park managers within the pilot regions were the project coordinators. They helped define the interests and promoted interaction among stakeholders. They were in charge of the financial matters of the parks and reported to the Park Directorates. The local parks staff shared information on their progress with both the Park Directorates and the BCEG Project.

2.2 Context of the Consultant's Assignment

The pilot ecotourism project strategy was based on *the process of social engineering and stimulating development of relationships* at local and national level. A key step was the organization of two ecotourism initiative groups - Rila Ecotourism Initiative Group-Samokov and Central Balkan Ecotourism Initiative Group-Kalofer. The process of internal development and growth of the initiative groups and encouraging the public's interest in their activities was very important.

The consultant's assignment was to assist the ecotourism initiative groups in developing a common agenda and *creating an environment for developing partnerships*. The process included team building and agreement on sharing responsibilities, group structuring, identifying participants' interests, and developing cooperation for implementing specific activities. The consultant acted as a mediator too, and shared information between the National Working Group¹ and local initiative groups.

The following methods were used:

- *Field consultations on issues related to direct activities of initiative groups* – this included: preparation of events promoting tourist products, planning campaigns for attracting public attention, and preparation of documents and procedures for legal registration of the groups.
- *Setting practical assignments/tasks for additional work outside of the working meetings* – this included: developing brochures and meeting with local community representatives to discuss the initiative groups' activities and address local concerns.
- *Training* – this included sessions on fundraising, project planning, and strategic planning
- *Facilitating working meetings* - supporting the process of identifying the participants' mutual interests and responsibilities in the ecotourism initiative groups.

¹ The National Working Group consists of representatives of the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Environment and Waters, representatives of the two national parks, an eco- entrepreneurship expert from BCEG Project and an ecotourism project consultant.

3.0 Ecotourism Initiative Groups

3.1 Establishment of the Initiative Groups and their Significance

The National parks staff initiated the establishment of the multi-stakeholder ecotourism initiative groups in the pilot regions. This process began during public discussions of the management plans for the Rila and Central Balkan National Parks. Discussions at the local level continued and were actively supported by Rila National Park section managers in Beli Iskar and Govedartsi and the Kalofer section manager for the Central Balkan National Park.

The park section managers were respected and trusted by the community and local entrepreneurs. Of key importance was the fact that the park section managers were local people and well aware of the local situation, people and institutions. Consequently, it was easier to attract local people to the ecotourism initiative groups and the relatively new institution in the country, the national parks. As a result the ecotourism initiative groups included *representatives of local municipalities, local entrepreneurs - tourist services providers, craftsmen, guides, representatives of NGO-s and park officers.*

Building consensus and searching for mutually acceptable decisions were the basic principles of interaction both within the groups and in the local communities. A consultant-facilitator provided support to the groups.

The initiative groups and their activities were *the main mechanism for developing an ecotourism model and promoting broad public interest* in the philosophy and practice of ecotourism. These emerging initiative groups promote important processes in local communities related to defining a new vision for local development and new possibilities for economic development.

3.2 Summary of the Activities of the Ecotourism Initiative Groups

3.2.1. One of the first joint activities of the ecotourism initiative groups was the development of action plans. In May 2001 both groups developed action plans whose main objectives included:

- Conservation of nature and the development of cooperation between the Park management and the local community
- Establishing and marketing ecotourism products
- Ensuring informational resources and infrastructure improvements

The action plans systematized the work of the participants and contributed to a clearer vision of their mutual work. For the first time participants envisaged joint ecotourism business development. Specific tasks were assigned and the first working groups were formed (Appendices 2.1, 2.2).

3.2.2. The groups began by establishing a database for tourist services and products opportunities for the parks and surrounding areas. A consultative team of 13 post-graduate students from George Washington University, led by Dr. Donald Hawkins,

supported the inventory effort. The team worked with the initiative groups in elaborating their programs for ecotourism. This formed the basis for developing individual business plans.

- 3.2.3. Development of the ecotourism initiative groups was enhanced by training sessions on establishing tourist products, management of tourist resources in the national parks, and business planning and ecotourism development, held in June 2001. The training revealed new points of view and new understandings about ecotourism. It also helped the group participants develop new skills. The initiative groups learned more about ecotourism concepts and standards.
- 3.2.4. Preparation for and executing the events related to the national parks also acted as catalysts for group development. The ecotourism initiative groups organized events to celebrate the dedication of Rila National Park's newly constructed entrance, and the 10-year anniversary of Central Balkan National Park. Both events took place in October 2001 and were prepared jointly by the groups and parks management (Appendices 2.5, 2.6).

These events also played a decisive role in mobilizing the newly created groups. For the first time, the groups promoted and marketed their tourist products. They began to understand the value of joint planning and the opportunities to market their ecotourism products. Strategies for attracting visitors/clients, public relations and marketing were prepared and implemented.

The 10 year anniversary celebration of Central Balkan National Park attracted significant official attention in Kalofer, while the Malyovitsa event opening the infrastructure in Rila National Park turned into a community celebration with about 1000 visitors (ref. self evaluation of initiative groups in appendices 3.1 and 3.2).

- 3.2.5. In November 2001 representatives of the two ecotourism initiative groups participated in a two-week study tour to the United States, financed by Program TRANSIT and USAID.

This study tour was an important training event for the participants. Following the visit, the initiative groups' representatives locally promoted their increased understanding of protected areas management and the essence of sustainable tourism development in the areas surrounding the parks.

In December 2001, following the study tour, representatives of the groups proposed action plans. After review and changes by all participants, the plans were adopted and implementation begun (Appendices 2.3 and 2.4).

- 3.2.6. In January 2002 thirteen entrepreneurs from the two initiative groups took part in a workshop on business plan development conducted by the Program for Business Promotion FLAG of the University of Delaware.

Following this training and with consultative support, one of the Samokov entrepreneurs developed a business plan and obtained funding for his project. The training and the good examples set by competitors encouraged other entrepreneurs to

develop business plans. In spite of the difficulties small business have in obtaining credit in Bulgaria, there are other projects proposed that presumably might be sufficiently prepared to obtain credit support. Access to credit resources will boost the confidence of local entrepreneurs. The BCEG Project has provided important help in this regard.

- 3.2.7. In March – April 2002, the initiative groups participated in a workshop on developing tools for market research. They were given training in defining their clients' profile and the expected characteristics of the ecotourism market in Bulgaria.

Results from these workshops have already been realized. The newly established Ecotourism Associations (see 2.2.10) are adapting their services, products and promotion materials accordingly. Advertising brochures were prepared jointly with the parks management. Each of the Associations described what they have to offer tourists. Market research results helped the associations in identifying ideas for enriching ecotourism products.

- 3.2.8. In June 2002 the initiative groups took part in a workshop on the selection of indicators and tools for measuring ecotourism impact in pilot regions. With the help of professors and students from Sofia University, a database has been developed to assist in monitoring changes in the regions.

- 3.2.9. In June 2002, after clarifying interests, mutual responsibilities, and benefits, Ecotourism Association Rila and Ecotourism Association Central Balkan-Kalofer were set up.

- 3.2.10. In July and August 2002 the newly formed Associations began developing strategic plans. Both Associations further defined their vision, mission, and main goals. They have begun preparation of action plans.

The Associations have received specialized technical assistance in marketing development and they have begun to develop their business strategies. This process will continue in the months to follow (Appendices 2.7 and 2.8).

- 3.2.11. In August 2002 representatives of both Associations took part in a training seminar on project planning. Key problems were identified for them to focus on.

A joint proposal was submitted to the World Learning Program (Appendix 5.1.) The project is targeted broadly at local communities in the pilot regions and aims to improve their understanding of ecotourism and create an environment for attracting new tourists. This was the first time the two Associations worked together on project planning. This cooperative work has promoted a partnership in project planning and implementation.

- 3.2.12. The Ecotourism Associations took part in the National Ecotourism Forum held in Sofia from 2 to 4 October 2002. They prepared displays that showcased local opportunities for ecotourism in the municipalities of Samokov and Kalofer. These were presented at the open-air ecotourism exhibition accompanying the Forum.

Preparation of the Associations' displays highlighted the communities' common interests and stimulated the interests of more supporters from within the communities.

The knowledge and skills acquired from the training sessions helped Association members in developing innovative projects concepts presented at the National Ecotourism Forum. Both Associations were among the first 12 organizations awarded small grants to further develop their proposals to submit for donor funding (Appendices 5.2 and 5.3).

3.3 Analysis of the Development of the Initiative Groups

Classic internal group dynamics processes were at work during the development of the ecotourism initiative groups (April to October 2001). There are *four basic stages* in this process— group establishment, conflict stage, setting the norms, and action.

It should be noted that the overall norms and objectives were initially defined externally. In spite of their support for park biodiversity values and their good intentions in developing business groups the participants in the initiative groups had not attempted to get organized on their own before the pilot ecotourism project began. The national parks' encouragement of local partnerships *prompted the establishment of groups motivated by specific behavior norms and aimed at satisfying specific needs through group objectives.*

It was *the process of identifying common aims and their internalization (internal acceptance by each individual)* that made the task of partnership development so complex. The following section describes the four stages in the development of the ecotourism initiative groups. The conflict stage has been actually present in both groups but it is not an indispensable stage in every joint activity.

Stage 1: Group Formation

The *local staff of the national parks* initiated the establishment of the ecotourism initiative groups. The park section managers of Beli Iskar and Govedarts, of Rila National Park, and the Kalofer section manager for the Central Balkan National Park made the first contacts and studied the local situation. As community insiders and people of authority who enjoy community respect, they proved to be excellent at attracting local entrepreneurs and authorities to the pilot activities. The fact that they were from within the community was of key importance in building public confidence in this initiative.

It was quite natural that *the managers of the two parks evolved as leaders* during the formation period. This initial stage lasted 5 – 6 months and was a period of frustration and lack of confidence on the part of the participants. In spite of their declared support and interest in participating in the pilot activities, a considerable number of people in both initiative groups needed more time to adjust and to identify with the objectives of the joint activities. Various questions came up, such as: “What is going to happen?” “How shall we work together?” “Should we be open with one another and with people involved in the project and the park management?”

The situation was further complicated by the necessity to stimulate an entrepreneurial spirit in the Kalofer region, and to moderate expectations for immediate change among some members of the Rila initiative group.

In this initial stage, the park managers coordinated the work of the groups despite the fact that there were leaders formally elected by the participants. It was noted that participants lacked the necessary level of awareness of their common interests and, due to feelings of rivalry; it was hard for them to accept the leadership of one of their own. Members of the ecotourism initiative groups viewed the park managers as people of authority and as unquestionable leaders. This was the only possible arrangement at the beginning of the groups' work, and it was an important factor in getting people to stay in the groups. It was too soon to speak about internalization of objectives in spite the existence of action plans (Appendices 2.1 and 2.2).

Stage 2: Period of Conflicts

Conflict is normal in the development of a relationship. Conflict can occur differently in different environments. Conflict arose first within the Rila Ecotourism Initiative Group-Samokov. It was characterized by increasing resistance against group control and participants clearly expressed their feelings of tension. It should be noted here that members from the *Samokov municipality group* consisted of business representatives from different settlements within the municipality. They were successful businesspeople and showed leadership characteristics.

In March-April 2002, one year after the project began, part of the group tried to set its own agenda, which was rejected by the rest of the initiative group. Those that initiated this action seemed to have rather high expectations that everything would go smoothly, and quickly lead to profit from ecotourism business. They left the Rila group and later set up a separate association.

The conflict was triggered by a member of the initiative group from Beli Iskar who saw the interests of participants from the villages and from the town of Samokov as being different. This person proposed Beli Iskar as the center for joint activities. This proposal showed a lack of awareness about competition among the localities. Representatives of big business exploited the conflict and encouraged the division within the initiative group. The rest of the group consolidated around the view that ecotourism development is a moral issue; that it is not just about making a quick and easy profit. Thus they had a broader view of why ecotourism development is important.

Conflicts in *the Central Balkan Ecotourism Initiative Group-Kalofer* were not so obvious. One reason for this was the fact that participants' businesses were less developed and internal competition less strong. Attacks were directed at one member who sought the leadership position and was met with rejection by the others. Another dimension of conflict was the perception that the initiative group was a carrier of change that meant a lot of uncertainty for Kalofer. Local people openly demonstrated their distrust and skeptic attitude towards ecotourism development.

The conflict in the Rila group was within the group, while the conflict in Kalofer was between the ecotourism initiative group and the local people. *Several factors are important in analyzing these conflicts:*

- Rila Ecotourism Initiative Group-Samokov had broad regional representation. There were people from three villages (Beli Iskar, Mala Tsurkva, Govedartsa) and the town of Samokov. Confidence building, working together, and agreeing on common objectives seemed to require more time since participants were not able to meet on a regular basis. The Central Balkan Ecotourism Initiative Group-Kalofer included participants only from Kalofer and this made it easier to meet regularly, coordinate activities, and exchange information.
- Participants from the municipality of Samokov were active entrepreneurs with well-developed individual businesses. This was not true for other participants. This difference, in part, made it was more difficult to clarify and specify common business objectives, and agree on group responsibilities, since the successful entrepreneurs were concerned about their business interests.
- In Kalofer, the paternalistic attitudes of the local people conflicted with the initiatives of the group. Each proposal for change was initially perceived negatively. There was no entrepreneurial spirit at first. There were no actions taken against the group's initiatives, but the lack of confidence was quite obvious.

The groups took actions in these conflict situations to maintain their participation and go on with their activities. Both groups organized and conducted public meetings with local communities to identify goals. The Rila group went through a difficult period and several participants left the group. The remaining entrepreneurs kept working in the initial group.

Stage 3: Working Together/Establishing Norms within the Group

Participants in both initiative groups began to feel a part of the group. *A common identity* united participants around the idea of the need for institutionalization. Partnership activities increased as did participation in group tasks. The groups intensified their interactions and met between official meetings. Their ability to work together improved and roles became clearer. This cohesiveness led to the establishment of the Rila Ecotourist Association-Samokov and the Central Balkan Ecotourism Association-Kalofer in June 2002. The Associations have plans to sponsor joint activities in the future.

Participants are still learning how to work together, and roles and activities continue to be defined and structured. They are developing procedures to allocate duties and improve communication among members of the Associations. The Associations' regulations set the framework; however their members lack organizational skills for managing the organization, decision-making, and team building.

Stage 4: Period of Action

By August-September 2002, both Associations (no longer the initiative groups) were operating effectively in an atmosphere of trust and cooperation, and began developing their strategic plans. This stage will continue for quite some time until there is a higher level of effectiveness in their operations.

The groups have new leaders as the park managers relinquished their leadership role once the initiative groups became nonprofit organizations. The leader (secretary) of the Central Balkan Ecotourism Association-Kalofer is not engaged in private business. The other members of the Association are comfortable with this person since they do not feel intimidated by this person's knowledge and understanding of business and economic development. In contrast, the leader (executive manager) of the Rila Ecotourism Association-Samokov operates one of the most successful hotel accommodation businesses in the region.

The Associations are establishing new group norms and will be taking new actions in the future.

Recruiting new members to the Associations during this period will be challenging. While new members might change the character of the group, they may have new perspectives on business development of the Associations. Turnover in membership may increase and broaden local community support. The *leaders* will play crucial roles in both organizations.

The Associations and their members will need strong individuals who are able to promote ecotourism. The chairpersons of the Associations' managing boards are prominent public figures at national level. Part of their role, in addition to representative functions at the national level, will be to support the solidification of the evolving groups. Their public image should be used at the local level to *create an atmosphere of trust*. This should also be a role for each of the members of the managing boards. In the future, they will need training on defining future board functions and responsibilities and how to execute them.

4.0 Ecotourism Associations

4.1 Institutionalization of Partnerships

The establishment of the Rila and Central Balkan Ecotourism Associations developed out of the work of the ecotourism initiative groups on preparing and promoting tourist products the two pilot regions. Gradually, by handling conflicts and learning from *their own experiences*, *the local people realized the advantage of working together*.

The organization and promotion of events related to national parks was very important to the success of the initiative groups (Appendices 2.5, 2.6). This was the first successful attempt at a joint activity. After participating together in the study tour to the United States, members began to institutionalize the partnerships that existed in the two ecotourism initiative groups. Initiative group participants gradually arrived at the idea that associations per se are important because they were viewed as having a specific identity and were more readily accepted by the local communities. They proved helpful in developing more successful business strategies at the local level.

Several months of discussion and preparation of regulations for the associations followed. The regulations underwent several iterations before participants agreed on the final versions. The Rila Ecotourism Association-Samokov was established on June 20, 2002 and the Central Balkan Ecotourism Association-Kalofer formed a week later, on the 28th of June. Both associations are registered as non-governmental organizations with the right to perform economic activities (Appendices 6.1 and 6.2)

Their organizational structure includes a general assembly, which is the decision making body, and a managing board in charge of the Associations' normal operations. The managing board of the Rila Association consists of 7 persons and the Central Balkan Association has 9. Both managing boards include *representatives of businesses, parks management, and prominent public figures in the field of nature protection and biodiversity conservation*. The initial idea was to have only local people on the managing boards, but gradually the groups realized that individuals with public prestige would add credibility to the Associations and help promote their goals. (Appendices 1.1 and 1.2)

The Associations are convinced that their partnership with the national parks will give them additional opportunities for developing their own business and further promote the values of nature conservation. In fact, the Rila Ecotourism Association came out against harvesting timber in the region of Govedartsi in the summer 2002.

The Ecotourism Associations' objectives include:

- Development of sustainable tourism
- Conservation, maintenance and recreation of natural resources
- Ensuring opportunities for tourism employment within the local community
- Coordination of interests and activities and activating institutions and organizations associated with ecotourism development

4.2 Ecotourism Associations and their Importance for Local Communities

The Rila and Central Balkan Ecotourism Associations ensure the *integration of interests among businesses, regional development, and nature protection*. Training received by local entrepreneurs as part of the pilot project activities improved their understanding of the philosophy and practice of ecotourism.

Ecotourism Associations and Local Development

The Associations are able to provide a number of services and types of information on ecotourism opportunities around Rila and Central Balkan National Parks. These include information on:

- Accommodation in private lodgings and family hotel
- Tourist trails in Rila and Central Balkan National Parks
- Educational programs for students

The Associations are also able to:

- Organize visits and observations of natural and cultural attractions
- Provide transport services in the region of municipality Samokov

The Associations also developed:

- Regional tourist information and accommodation booking systems

These activities are targeted at attracting clients and *increasing the income from tourism within the local community*. The Associations can, and have, established models for local economic development. This fact is clearly understood by key representatives of local authorities in the Samokov region and in Kalofer.

A municipal building in Kalofer was given to the Central Balkan National Parks. Representatives of the municipality, the Park, and the Central Balkan Ecotourism Association-Kalofer have formally agreed that the Association will use a portion of the building for an Information Center for a period of 10 years. The municipality of Samokov has expressed its intention to provide space to develop a center that all the organizations involved in tourism development in the area can share. The mayor of Govedartsı provided for use of an all terrain vehicle by Rila Ecotourism Association member who operates a mountain guide business.

These examples demonstrate the successful implementation of the pilot projects in both regions and the local support for ecotourism development that the Project has generated. In addition to directly promoting ecotourism products and services, the Associations have *the opportunity to influence the development of regional development strategies*, since both pilot regions have the appropriate conditions for ecotourism development.

Ecotourism Associations and Local Businesses

The Ecotourism Associations can act as a catalyst for local business development. Since most of the production enterprises that provided local employment are out of operation, *ecotourism is viewed as providing alternative employment opportunities.*

Associations have an important role in the development of local businesses because they have information that is key to developing local economic development strategies. Association members can provide consultations in ecotourism development to potential entrepreneurs and local authorities. Thus the Ecotourism Associations *can enhance their role as incubators for local businesses.* This will happen if good institutional management is ensured and training activities for Association members are conducted.

Ecotourism Associations and National Parks

The partnership model applied in these two pilot regions demonstrated that park management teams are interested in developing cooperative arrangements with local communities around the parks. In a comparatively short period of time, one and a half years, local people are more aware of the economic benefits of the conservation of nature. While only a limited number of people may have changed their attitude, the fact that there is a change in attitude is important. In the future the attitudes of more people will likely begin to change.

As the national parks promote better relationships with entrepreneurs from other settlements surrounding the parks, they will help ensure regional development of ecotourism.

5.0 Publicity in the Work of Initiative Group/Ecotourism Associations

From the beginning, the ecotourism initiative groups *were encouraged to share their experience and intentions* with the local communities. An important element of the project strategy was to promote their successes and regularly inform the public of their activities. *At first, the participants of the initiative groups* had neither feelings of identity nor positive experiences, so they had their doubts about the success of joint activities. They did not feel ready to share their ideas with the larger community.

The success of the two park events in October 2001 gave the initiative groups pride in their accomplishments. They had good reasons to inform the larger community. The initiative groups prepared and carried out a marketing campaign and a public information campaign. Local media were involved and many people in the local communities were informed for the first time and attracted to the cause of ecotourism development. New participants became active members in the groups. Other local people supported organizing and carrying out the events either by volunteering their time or donating funds. The publicity increased the public's confidence in the ecotourism initiative groups.

This publicity encouraged the groups to use other means of informing the communities. Aware of the fact that *ecotourism would be a success only if it enjoys the support and understanding of the communities*, the Rila initiative group held public meetings in Samokov and in all villages of the pilot project – Govedarts, Mala Tsurkva and Beli Iskar. Information on the objectives, joint activities, and opportunities for participation were presented. In January 2002, the Rila initiative group prepared a public presentation on what they learned during the study tour to the United States. The mayor of Samokov, host of the meeting, publicly declared his readiness to support ecotourism development.

There was a period when members of the Central Balkan initiative group had to be convinced that the stagnation in local economy would be overcome only if people got involved. The entrepreneurial spirit of local people was stimulated after a meeting with representatives of crafts, restaurant businesses and private lodgings accommodation services, where people were informed on the activities of initiative group members and their grounds. Following this meeting the negative attitudes gradually lessened and effective steps towards tourism-related entrepreneurship were taken.

The initiative groups focused on three key areas in their public information efforts:

- Informing the local community, aimed at expanding their impact and strengthening the image of the ecotourism initiative groups
- Marketing and advertising, aimed at improving profits from ecotourism
- Attracting the attention of the public at large, aimed at stimulating support on the national level and developing a lobby for the development of ecotourism

The publicity efforts had several effects:

1. Local people were informed on opportunities for ecotourism development;
2. Public confidence in the activities of initiative groups and the pilot activities increased
3. Representatives of local authorities were made more aware of the opportunities for local development of ecotourism
4. New business development was promoted at the local level. For example new private lodgings were registered in the Kalofer region
5. Existing businesses were officially legalized. For example successful entrepreneurs from the Samokov region, who were not officially licensed, worked to legalize their businesses as they saw the possibilities for development.

After the Rila and Central Balkan Ecotourism Associations were established, participants organized another public presentation on the Associations' objectives and activities. *This institutionalized form of partnership has increased the trust of institutions and the general public in the Associations' plans for future work.*

6.0 Recommendations

6.1 Recommendations to Ecotourism Associations Rila and Central Balkan - Kalofer

- Both associations are newly set up and are in the beginning of the process for evolving effective structure and culture of the organization. The main objective uniting association members related to ecotourism development, can be achieved only if associations keep on with their efforts for evolving *their identity* which in turn will attract new members.
- It would be necessary *to broaden membership representation of both associations*. A considerable number of community people interested in ecotourism development should be attracted.
- The associations should maintain their identity and public image in way that the emergence of other ecotourism associations within the same community would not be necessary. Present associations can turn to be *the main focal unit of community for ecotourism development, in the municipalities in question*. With a view to this, local people should be informed consistently and forms and mechanisms for attracting and stimulating public interest to associations' activities, should be developed.
- As both associations have legal status, they should initiate steps at this stage to *inform officially local authorities on their action plans*. As a first step, made with the support of BCEG Project, the first positive contacts with local government representatives have been established. The proactive role of associations will include: submitting documents and proposals to municipal councils of Karlovo and Samokov, stating the public interest in the area of ecotourism, negotiating for policy making in support to ecotourism.
- It is essential as next steps of the associations to *continue the work on strategy development*. This process started in August 2002 and acted as a unifying factor of association members. Visions and missions of both associations and their main strategic goals have been stated. It would be useful to involve key representatives of local authorities and other community people and experts in the process of strategy development. After that these strategies are to be officially submitted and put to discussion /or parts of them/ at the municipal councils and become part of regional development plans.
- Looking for opportunities for setting up of a national organization in the area of ecotourism would be supportive to reinforcing the associations at regional level. This would create possibilities too for membership in the International Ecotourism Association.
- The associations should work out administrative and business rules so that procedures are more defined and activities public. This publicity demonstrated in the work so far, should become integral part of future activities. Strengthening relations with local community and promoting the association's image will be of essential importance for ecotourism development and opportunities for participation and development of small businesses.

- Relations with national parks should continue and expand further. New dimensions for partnership should be explored by elaborating new joint action plans for establishing and proposing at the market new more sophisticated ecotourist products.

6.2 Recommendations to National Parks Rila and Central Balkan

- National parks supported and coordinated the initial establishing of partnerships for ecotourism development. In the further development of the process, *their role should be more indirect* to help local organizations in their self structuring.
- At the same time park management have to state more definitely *their requirements to joint ecotourist product and its implementation*. Financial parameters of partnerships have to be outlined.
- It would be helpful should park management support local associations in their promotion strategy – for example developing *an Internet web site of the parks including ecotourism opportunities*. This approach is especially relevant for international clients for it will contribute to the better image of associations' products on offer.
- Parks management can give their support for expanding ecotourism associations at regional level.

6.3 Recommendations to Local Authorities

- Ecotourism gives real opportunities for development of regional economies of the two pilot regions. Local authorities which function is to create conditions for development, are aware of it but it seems that they have not yet undertaken actions. At next stage they have to create *conditions for solving problems of infrastructure and enhancing the tourist outlook of settlements*.
- They could *support the institutional development of associations* by providing municipal property either free of charge or below the market prices to the association – for example for office premises.
- Urgent steps are to be taken for *joint developing of ecotourism projects in the regions of Samokov and Kalofer. These projects could involve development of infrastructure*.
- Local authorities can act as a *mediator committed to lobbying in favor of local interests in the field of ecotourism* in front of ministries and the Parliament.

6.4 Recommendations to BCEG Project

- It will be important for ecotourism associations' development in pilot regions *to be able to receive expert and consultative support for the future, too*. These associations are newly established and need institutional strengthening and formation of collective business skills in the field of ecotourism. At this stage of development, association members have become carriers of a significant change in comparison to the situation before, in terms of organizational and individual perspective. They seem to perceive their roles in a different way. The new situation requires updating of needs assessment with the participation of all

stakeholders. This assessment may result in a training program based on actual needs. Hence BCEG Project could possibly attract the attention of donors concerned in institutional training, to ecotourism associations.

- Association members are already well aware of the necessity for *certification of products and services and establishing standards*. This is an issue to be addressed at national level but pilot regions may be places for testing the process for developing ecotourism standards.
- Ecotourism associations act as mediators for ecotourism development in the regions of Samokov and Kalofer. They could be *supported in organizing public forums* which would make ecotourism much more popular and a cause of concern of local communities. Public forums will help to identify important issues for ecotourism development, for planning of public activities in the field of ecotourism, as well as for attracting donors' and institutional attention for finding solution to these issues. Another function of theirs could be integration of local communities around the idea for regional development on the basis of ecotourism.
- Association could be supported through stimulating establishment of *local funds for ecotourism development*. These type of funds would be possible if the appropriate regulations are provided, including local government regulations. Should it be not the case, then other forms and mechanism could be sought for realizing this idea for local funds. Its implementation would require the support of USAID, too.
- For a sustainable development of the associations as well as for the processes taking place in local communities, stimulated by the pilot ecotourism project of BCEG Project, it would be useful to attract the attention of other donors for development of projects in the pilot regions.
- In the process of initiative groups' and ecotourism associations formation, the representatives of National parks Rila and Central Balkan, park managers in pilot regions Mr. Vladimir Chapkansky, Emil Bogdanov and Nanko Minkov contributed a great deal for consolidating local community and their integration around the idea for cooperation with the parks. Therefore it is recommended BCEG Project to express official gratitude to the above mentioned people whose efforts contributed considerably to the successful implementation of this pilot project.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1.1

Founders' List Ecotourism Association Rila

1. Kiril Georgiev Runtov – Samokov, transport company
2. Rosalina Dimitrova Runtova – Samokov, teacher
3. Emilia Dimitrova Borissova – Samokov, hotel owner
4. Nadia Dimitrova Atanassova – Samokov, teacher
5. Radka Danailova Moskova – Samokov, information services
6. Hristo Vladov Konyarski – Beli Iskar village, horse riding club
7. Emilia Ivanova Konyarska – Beli Iskar village, hotel owner
8. Nikolai Spassov Djambazki – Govedartsi village, hotel owner
9. Ivan Hristov Stoinev – Mala Tsarkva village, hotel owner
10. Yordanka Borissova Stoineva – Samokov, hotel owner
11. Georgi Spassov Djambazki – Govedartsi village, hotel owner
12. Mimi Georgieva Pramatarova – Blagoevgrad, Rila NP director
13. Dimitar Raichev Peev – Sofia, biologist
14. Vladimir Stefanov Chapkanski – Samokov, Rila NP Section head
15. Emil Mitkov Bogdanov – Samokov, Rila NP Section head

Managing Board of the Association

1. Dimitar Peev - chairman
2. Mimi Pramatarova
3. Nikolai Djambazki
4. Ivan Stoinev
5. Kiril Runtov
6. Emil Bogdanov
7. Vladimir Chapkanski

Appendix 1.2

Founders' List **Ecotourism Association Central Balkan – Kalofer**

1. Hristo Delchev Delchev – zoologist
2. Dafina ilieva Guercheva- Nikolova – UNDP
3. Jeko Assenov Spiridonov – Wilderness Fund
4. Hristo Minkov Mermerski
5. Nanko Minkov Minkov – Kalofer Park Section head
6. Donna Ivanova Ivanova – Technical service – Kalofer municipality
7. Hristina Mineva Ganova – tax revenue service
8. Liliana Goergieva Djondjorova – hotel owner
9. Dimitar Stoyanov Marinov – private business
10. Dobrinka Dimitrova Tsutsova – hotel owner
11. Laliao Niklaev Ganchev – organic agriculture
12. Zlatka Nikolova Doktorska – restaurant owner
13. Toncho Hristov Tonchev – park employee
14. Donka Ivanova Kojeikova – hotel owner
15. Todor Ivanov Dikliev – mountain guide
16. Liliana Laleva Paralingova – hotel owner
17. Toshka Hristova Kanarova – hotel owner
18. Ginka Assenova Gonova – hotel owner
19. Velichka Toncheva Naidenova – hotel owner, crafts
20. Ludmila Stefanova Karadjova – crafts
21. Dimitar Alexandrov Tzvetkov – park employee

Managing Board of the Association

1. Hristo Delchev – chairman
2. Hristina Ganova – deputy chairman
3. Jeko Spiridonov
4. Dafina Guercheva
5. Hristo Mermerski
6. Donna Ivanova
7. Dimitar Marinov
8. Liliana Djondjorova
9. Nanko Minkov

Appendix 2.1

Action Plan
Rila Ecotourism Initiative Group - Samokov
May 2001

Vision for the future – nature and environment conservation, improvement of services, development of park infrastructure, improvement of tourist servicing skills, development of cooperation between the park and the local community, increased numbers of tourists and intensified use of facilities.

Based upon this vision the following objectives were defined:

- Nature protection
- Partnership development
- Professionalism and skill development
- Increased participation of the municipality
- Improvement of infrastructure
- Financial support for activities
- Improvement of the legal framework for ecotourism development
- Cooperative work on strategic marketing and development of tourist products
- Increase in visitor safety.

After a prioritization process the most important objectives for the Initiative Group were defined:

1. *Nature protection and development of cooperation between the Park and the local community.*
2. *Development and marketing of products.*
3. *Provide informational resources and improvement of infrastructure.*

The Initiative Group proposed *specific activities* to achieve their respective objectives.

Objective 1 Action Plan: “Nature Protection and Development of Cooperation between the Park and the Local Community”

Working group – Krassimir Runtov, Nikolai Djambazki, Emil Bogdanov

Sub-tasks	Activities	Responsible
<i>Sub-task 1:</i> Increase local peoples’ trust in the Park through training and information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public awareness of the Park’s management plan Conservation education Public awareness of Park attractions and their inclusion in tourist products 	PS Head Krassimir Runtov N. Djambazki, PS Head
<i>Sub-task 2:</i> Improve Park infrastructure through cooperation with the local community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identification of local people willing to participate Engagement of local communities in infrastructure development 	Emil Bogdanov Samokov municipality mayor
<i>Sub-task 3:</i> Initiate and organize special events.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Study local traditions Popularization and organization of feasts related to environment protection Celebration of the opening of the Park entrances 	N. Djambazki PS Head, PR – NPD NPD

Objective 2 Action Plan : “Development and Marketing of Products”

Working group – Hristo Konyarski, Hristo Zarkin, Lachezan Stefanov

Sub-tasks	Tasks	Responsible
<i>Subtask 1:</i> Improve peoples’ skills in developing tourist products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training on the essence of tourist products and the quality and quantity indicators that should be met. Evaluation of the diversification of tourist products opportunities Preparation of a manual for development of tourist products. 	
<i>Sub-task 2:</i> Complete the inventory.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Description of Ground 0 Development of database Summary of informational and photo materials 	
<i>Sub-task 3:</i> Market survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Market Needs Assessment Research the National Park visitors’ profiles and their needs 	
<i>Sub-task 4:</i> Examine ways to market the product	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigation of opportunities for the creation of own tour operators agency Determine adequacy of existing agencies 	

Recommendations for tourist products:

- Reflect the local features and the unique natural and cultural heritage;
- Include a visit to Rila National Park
- Meet a high standard of ecotourism quality.

Objective 3 Action Plan: “Provide Information Resources and Improvement of Infrastructure”

Working group – Lubka Kiosseva, Ludmila Stoikova, Ivan Stoinev, Vladimir Chapkanski

Sub-tasks	Activities	Responsible
<i>Subtask 1: Develop and improve the database</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation of a list of completed and in-process databases • Development of a unique format for describing facilities/ sites • Input of information in an adequate database • Preparation of information for an Internet page • Identification of suitable exemplary internet sites • Description of the Park services in the database and the Web page 	Ludmila, Ivan, Nikolai Don Hawkins Don Hawkins Don Hawkins Kamelia Georgieva, Don Hawkins Vladimir Chapkanski
<i>Subtask 2: Improve the villages' infrastructure (information boards, waste management, streets)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letter from the National Park Directorate to the Samokov Mayor with a request for funding and technical dislocation of the billboards • Meetings with the mayors of the three villages, about household solid waste • Preliminary research of opportunities for external funding of infrastructure projects 	Lubka Kiosseva, Vladimir Chapkanski Liubka Kiosseva, Ludmila Stoikova Kamelia Georgieva, Liubka Kiosseva Vladimir Chapkanski
<i>Subtask 3: Establish an Information Center</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigate opportunities for new Park Section office • Development of strategy 	Vladimir Chapkanski
<i>Subtask 4: Develop a public relations strategy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation of a calendar of events • Make information available to the local authority on the results of trainees visit to the USA team • Informing the population from the settlements 	Ludmila Stoikova Liubka Kiosseva Ludmila Stoikova, Ivan Stoinev, Nikolai Djambazki

Appendix 2.2

Action Plan of the Central Balkan Ecotourism Initiative Group- Kalofer May 2001

The first step in the joint planning process was the development of a Vision for the future by the Ecotourism Initiative Group. The following objectives were formulated as a result of sharing of ideas among all participants about what they would like to achieve in their businesses in the future:

- More tourist products offered
- Development of tourist products that represent local work traditions, crafts and holidays
- Development of Park infrastructure
- Nature Conservation
- Development of tourist attractions
- Attraction of more tourists
- Development of a partnership between the Central Balkan National Park and the local community
- Improvement of community infrastructure
- Development of tourist informational infrastructure and improvement in communications with tourists
- Improvement of the social status of the local population (increase in incomes and investments)

The Ecotourism Initiative Group defined the following as priority objectives:

1. *Nature conservation and development of cooperation between Central Balkan National Park and the local community.*
2. *Increase in the incomes and the investments of local people through the development of tourist products.*
3. *Development of tourist informational infrastructure and improvement of communication with tourists.*

The Initiative Group proposed particular actions that can lead to the achievement of their priority objectives.

**Objective 1 Action Plan: “Nature Conservation and Development of Cooperation
between the Central Balkan National Park and the Local Community”**

*Working group – Nanko Minkov, Liliana Paralingova, Georgi Filipov, Toncho Tonchev,
Donna Ivanova*

Subtasks	Actions	Responsible
<i>Subtask 1:</i> Increase in the sense of responsibility of tourists and citizens for nature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational outings in the Park with a focus on Park values • Conduct meetings with local people to acquaint them with the Park • Campaign for dissemination of leaflets and flyers about the Park in people’s homes, with the assistance of school pupils • Motivation of local volunteers for participation in the installation of Park infrastructure; • Public information on Park initiatives via local cable TV and radio; • Agreement for joint activities between the municipality and the Park for sanctioning violators 	<p>Nanko, Georgi, Liliana</p> <p>Nanko, Municipality</p> <p>Liliana, Donna</p> <p>Georgi, Nanko</p> <p>Nanko, Tzvetana</p> <p>Mayor, NPD, Nanko</p>
<i>Subtask 2:</i> Develop partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of Green Patrols Club for participation in environmental campaigns. Training pupils. • Preparation and organization of event for public expression of gratitude to the volunteers • Joint celebration of the Park birthday • Sharing experiences with Rila and Pirin National Parks • Sharing experiences with national parks from other countries • Training Park guards and teachers to work with children in the field of nature protection 	<p>PS guards, Velichka Naidenova, Lilyana, Vania Krusteva</p> <p>Municipality, Nanko</p> <p>Kalofer PS, Georgi</p> <p>NPD, Toncho</p> <p>Kamelia Goergieva, NPD, Velichka</p> <p>Kamelia, Liliana</p>

Objective 2 Action Plan : “Increase in Incomes and Investment through Tourist Product Development”

Working group – Nikolai Staikov, Ivan Doktorski, Maria Markova, Tzvetana Petkova, Svetla Yoveva

Subtasks	Actions	Responsible
<i>Subtasks 1:</i> Prepare a manual on the development of tourist products, including a training program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation and development of manual • Conduct a workshop for preparation of tourist products • Output Report from the workshop 	GW Municipality, NPD ARD
<i>Subtask 2:</i> Develop new products and update the inventory of existing products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop new trails • Human resources assessment • Establish trade marks • Investigate market niches through review of materials and meetings with tour operators. 	PS, Mountain Rescue Service Svetla, Tzvetana Don Hawkins, Velichka Naidenova
<i>Subtask 3:</i> Examine possible sources of funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical assistance • Research on funding market • Preparation of projects 	ARD ARD Working groups

Objective 3 Action Plan: “Development of Tourist Information Infrastructure and Improvement of Communication with Tourists”

Working group– Petya Kovacheva, Ludmila Karadjova, Liliana Djondjorova, Dobrinka Tsutsova

Subtasks	Actions	Responsible
<i>Subtask 1:</i> Develop a database	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update of existing inventory Preparation of a calendar of holidays Introduce software 	Donna, Dobrinka Svetla Trojan PS, PTF Kamelia Georgieva
<i>Subtask 2:</i> Marketing and advertising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research existing experience in marketing and advertising Specification of contents of the Internet page Preparation and development of Internet page Provision of web site manager 	Don Hawkins Don Hawkins
<i>Subtask 3:</i> Public relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a public relations strategy Organize an open meeting before and at the end of the USA study tour trainees' visit in Sofia Provide information periodically to the municipality and the Mayor's office 	Kamelia Goergieva ARD Nanko
<i>Subtask 4:</i> Establish an Information Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define the conditions for the use of the municipal building Information Center strategy development Development of a Business Plan Design and completion of the Information Center 	Petya, Nanko Kamelia, NPD, Initiative Group Don Hawkins Consultant, Kamelia Georgieva
<i>Subtask 5:</i> Establish Information Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Selection of adequate locations outside the Park Project proposal Specification of permission procedures Production and installation of billboards and signs Preparation and dislocation of the park infrastructure 	Liliana Donka NPD

Appendix 2.3

Action Plan of the Rila Ecotourism Initiative Group - Samokov

Goal:

Sustainable Tourism Development

Sub-Goals:

- Conserving the environment
- Increasing tourist flow to the region
- Increasing business opportunities

TASKS	Action Plan			
	Strategies	Resources	Responsibility	Deadline
I Group identification	Ia/ legal consultation	Ia/ consultants	№ 1 Ivan	Ia/ 31.12.01
II Development of tourist routes	IIa/ training guides IIb/ development of routes – historical; Environmental; Educational;	IIa/ human resources IIb/ financial means	№ 2 Vladi	IIa/ 01.12.01 IIb/ 01.02.02
III Elaboration of promotional materials	IIIa/ design; IIIb/ production; IIIc/ distribution; IIId/ web-page;	IIIa/ human resources IIIb/ financial means	№ 3 Radka	IIIa/ 31.03.02
IV Promotion of the values of Rila National Park	IVa/ calendar of future events - festivals, craft exhibitions; sport calendars – skiing, horseback riding, biking, mountaineering, sport fishing, etc.	IVa/ human resources IVb/ financial means IVc/ relations with the municipal authorities	№ 4 Nellie	IVa/ 31.03.02
V Development of partnership mechanisms	Va/ Cooperation with the municipal authorities Vb/ Cooperation with the local communities	Va/ Initiative Group Vb/ Rila NPD Vc/ MoE and MoEW	№ 5 Lucy	Va/ 31.01.02
VI Establishment of Information Center	VIa/ Identify appropriate locations VIb/ Design and construction	VIa/ financial means VIb/ public relations	№ 6 Radka	VIa/ 31.01.02
VII Establishment of training facilities	VIIa/ Program VIIb/ Establishment of animal hospital and herbarium of common species in Rila National Park	VIIa/ financial means VIIb/ relations with the local municipalities and ministries	№ 7 Vladi	VIIa/ 31.03.02
VIII Redirection of tourist flow			№ 8 Vladi	VIIIa/ 30.11.02

Appendix 2.4

**Action Plan
of the
Central Balkan Ecotourism Initiative Group-Kalofer**

Tasks	Strategies	Activities	Responsibility	Deadline
Task 1: Certification of available tourist services, as well as increases in their numbers and quality.	1.1. Engaging the local community	1. Meeting of Study Tour team with the entire Initiative Group.	D. Tsutsova	22.11.2001
		2. Meeting of the Initiative Group with the local community	Initiative group	end of December
		3. Meeting to discuss new ideas for presenting local tourist resources	Initiative group	
	1.2. Training the Initiative Group and tourist services providers in Kalofer	1. Consultation about the legislation related to tourist services.	ARD	01.2002
		2. Hospitality and service quality training (by groups – hotel-keepers, restaurant-keepers, guides).	Initiative group and ARD	within 3 months
		3. Legalize the Initiative Group	Group and ARD	within 3 months
Task 2: Presenting the Kalofer ecotourism product.	2.1. Establish an Information Center.	1. Ensure a building for the Kalofer Information Center.	Kalofer municipality	within 3 months
		2. Repair and equip the Center.	Initiative group	within 6 months
		3. Prepare a business plan for the Center.	Initiative group	within 3 months
	2.2. Preparation and distribution of promotional materials.	1. Describe topical trails and prepare leaflets and maps.	Initiative group	within 3 months
		2. Develop promotional materials for the electronic media and Internet.	Initiative group	within 3 months
		3. Place billboards at the town entrances.	Initiative group	within 6 months

Appendix 2.5

**Action Plan for the Rila National Park Entrance Opening,
prepared by the Rila Ecotourism Initiative Group- Samokov
July 2001**

Objectives:

1. Publicize the values of Rila National Park
2. Attract tourists, interested in ecotourism.

Strategy:

The event will serve as an opportunity to inform a larger number of people about Rila National Park and its landmarks. Opportunities will include a practical combination of local tourist services and an introduction to the Park's natural features. Guests and tourists will be accommodated overnight outside the park territory and will use the services of local hotel owners, restaurant owners, attractions, craftsmen, and transport companies. The event will generate income for local entrepreneurs.

The strategy for attracting interest in the event will be targeted at special guests such as representatives of diplomatic missions, tour operators, municipality officials, ministries, and tourists interested in nature-based tourism.

The central event for the opening of the park entrances and ribbon cutting will be at Maliovitza.

The Ecotourism Initiative Group and Rila National Park will actively participate in the preparation of the event. The planned activities will be coordinated through the Information Center, where all the information will be delivered and summarized. Working groups will be formed for carrying out the main elements of the planned activities. The person with primary responsibility for coordinating the working groups is the Beli Iskar Park Section Head Vladimir Chapkanski.

Action Plan

Activity	Deadline	Responsible	How much it will cost
<u>Group 1 – reception/ meeting, accommodation, catering</u>			
• Develop criteria for the selection of accommodation facilities	1 August	Nicky, Lucy, Ivan	
• Inspect and select the accommodation facilities	15 August	Nicky, Lucy, Ivan	
• Describe the facilities and submit information to the Information Center	15 August	Nicky, Lucy, Ivan	
• Establish contact with the manager of Maliovitza complex and negotiate hall space	1 August	Nicky, Emil	
• Make arrangements for barbecue for the opening	1 August	Nicky, Emil	
• Organize barbecue and cocktail		Nicky, Ivan	
• Agree on pricing policy for the event	1 August		

<u>Group 2 – Public relations and work with the media</u>			
• Select a logo, depicting the partnership and motto of the event	June	Students,	
• Prepare a VIP List	15 August	Initiative group	
• Design an invitation	15 August	NPD, Vladi,	
• Design and print leaflets for the event	1 September	Radka	
• Prepare advertising materials (badges, flags, hats, and transparencies)	1 September	Radka, Vladi	
• Develop steps of the public relations campaign	3 August	Vladi, Radka,	
• Research advertising materials to use as a model	1 August	ARD	
		K. Georgieva,	
		Initiative group	
		Group	
<u>Group 3 – Attractions and trails</u>			
• Describe attractions and trails for the event	1 August	Hristo Konyarski,	
• Summarize and present information to the Information Center	15 August	Vladi	
• Assess guides and prepare a list of guides for the event	1 August	Hristo Konyarski.	
		Vladi	
<u>Group 4 - Prepare folklore program and work with children</u>			
• Select location for the stage	1 August	Emil	
• Prepare the stage	1 August	Working group	
• Agreement on sound system	1 August	Emil	
• Auditions for folklore and other performers in the program	1-10 September	Lili, Roza	
• Prepare scenario for program and opening event	10 September	Roza, Lili	
• Select announcer	10 September	Roza, Lili	
• Prepare program for children (games and prizes)	1 August	Roza, Lili	
<u>Group 5 – Transport and Logistics</u>			
• Send letters to Traffic Police, Fire Department, Medical Emergency, Mountain Rescue Service	31 August	NPD, Vladi,	
• Assess transport needs of each group (children, performers, guests, and tourists)	Until 5 September	Municipality	
• Parking lot organization	Until 12 September	Krassy	
• Develop a schedule and timetable for the days of the event	12 September	Krassy, Vlady	
• Negotiate for transport of tourists with the municipality, etc.	8 September	Krassy	
• Organization of waste disposal (special bags)	10 September	Krassy, Lubka	
		Hristo Konyarski,	
		Vladi	

<p><u>Group 6 – Craft Fair</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct working meeting to agree on the conditions for the participation of the craftsmen • Mark terrain for exhibition area • Prepare list of Fair participants <p><u>Attract volunteers</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual meetings with potential volunteers • Meeting on volunteer recruitment at the Social Consulting Center • Working meeting with volunteers for debriefing and distribution of tasks • Express gratitude to volunteers <p><u>Attract sponsors</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attract large sponsors (Kamenitsa, Neftohim, MobilTel, GloBul, Sofyiska Voda, Sofia Municipality, Nestle, electricity company) • Attract local sponsors 	<p>Until 1 August</p> <p>30 July 15 August</p> <p>1 August</p> <p>1 August</p> <p>20 August After the event</p>	<p>Boiko, Alexander</p> <p>Alexander, Vladi Alexander</p> <p>Initiative group</p> <p>Alexander</p> <p>Vladi, Initiative group</p> <p>NPD</p> <p>Initiative group</p>	
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Working groups:

1. PR and advertising– Radka, Vladi.
2. Meeting and accommodation (lodging and the meals) - Nikolai, Ivan, Lucy.
3. Attractions and trails – Hristo Konyarski, Anton Blagoev , Hristo Zarkin.
4. Preparation of folklore program and work with children – Roza, Lili, Evelin, Emil (will provide technical coverage and plans for the program).
5. Transport and logistics – Krassimir Runtov, Vladimir Chapkanski.
6. Craft Fair – Alexander Terziiski.

Appendix 2.6

Action Plan for the Celebration of the Central Balkan National Park Birthday Prepared by the Central Balkan Ecotourism Initiative group – Kalofer, July 2001

Objectives:

3. Publicize the values of the Central Balkan National Park
4. Present ecotourism products in the town of Kalofer.

Strategy:

The event will serve as an opportunity to inform a larger number of people about the Central Balkan National Park and its landmarks. Opportunities will include a practical combination of local tourist services and Park natural features. Guests and tourists will be accommodated overnight outside the park territory and will use the services of local hotel owners, restaurant owners, attractions, craftsmen, and transport companies. The event will generate income for local entrepreneurs.

The strategy for attracting interest in the event will be targeted at special guests such as representatives of diplomatic missions, tour operators, municipal officials, ministries, and tourists interested in nature-based tourism.

The celebration will begin with a program in the center of Kalofer on Saturday. Envisaged is an open feast in the Panitsite locality for all guests and tourists. A folklore program will be presented and a few new trails will be inaugurated. Young people and children from the town will be actively involved in the preparation of the events. A drawing contest will be held in the school on the topic of the Central Balkan National Park. The local community will donate volunteer time to improve a trail and clean the town.

The Ecotourism Initiative Group and the Central Balkan National Park will actively participate in the preparation of the event. Working groups will be established for the main elements of the planned activities. The person with primary responsibility for coordinating the working groups is Park Section Head in Kalofer Nanko Minkov.

The Initiative Group selected the Cultural House (Chitalishte) for the place where information for the event will be coordinated, under the supervision of Svetla Yoveva, secretary. The Group will work to establish a coordination office before and during the event, since the proposed Information Center will not be completed.

Action Plan

Activity	Deadline	Responsible	How much it costs
<u>Accommodation Group</u>			
• Requests for people willing to provide accommodations	23 July	Tzvetana, Donna Ivanova	
• Describe the accommodation criteria	29 July	Working group	
• Working meeting with people providing accommodations	end of August	Working group	
• Select lodging facilities	beginning of September	Working group	
• Meet with hotel owners, to investigate opportunities for accommodation.	20 August	Donka Kojeikova, Donna Ivanova	
• Prepare lists with accommodation facilities and submit to temporary information center	20 September	Donka Kojeikova, Donna Ivanova	
<u>Attractions, Trails and Transport</u>			
• Describe the trails	End of August	Toncho, Laliao	
• Fortify the Eco-trail – Manastriski Bent	15 October	Toncho, Liliana, volunteers	
• Negotiate with transport companies	End of August	Ivan, Toncho	
• Assess transport needs for each of the groups	End of September	Responsible groups, Toncho	
• Specify type of transport for the Park Directorate VIPs	End of August	Nanko	
• Prepare transport schedule and timetable for the event days	15 October	Toncho, Ivan	
• Prepare lists of mountain guides and rescuers	31 August	Toncho	
• Specify trails in coordination with the management plan	End of August	Toncho, Nanko	
• Agreement on what attractions to provide (paragliding, mountain bikes)	31 August	Toncho	
• Agree on prizes for the contest participants	15 September	Toncho, sponsors	
<u>Work with children</u>			
• Prepare scenario for sport events at Panitsite	31 July	Liliana	
• Prepare and carry out the sport event	from 20 Sept. until the event	Liliana, teacher	
• Announcement of a drawing contest in the cultural house (Chitalishte)	17 September	Gymnastics	
• Prepare and conduct question riddle (Q&A game) in the school	beginning of October	Liliana, Arts teacher	
• Provide prizes for the contest winners	until the event	Liliana NPD	

<u>Public relations and advertising</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet with consultant to prepare a public relations and advertising concept and plan • Prepare advertising materials (transparencies, leaflets, hats, posters) • Summarize and describe the entire program related to the event • Collect and coordinate the information • Organize temporary coordination center • Prepare a plan for organizing the Information Center during the event • Prepare list of people and institutions to be invited • Discuss and prepare survey for visitors' opinions about the services during the event • Prepare and send letters to Traffic Police, Medical Emergency Service, MRS 	31 July	Initiative group, K. Georgieva Company, working group
	20 September	
	End of August	Working group
	Periodically	Svetla, Nanko
	24 August	Nanko, Svetla
	31 July	Nanko
	31 July	Initiative Group
<u>Cultural Events</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess performers • Select announcer • Negotiate for sound equipment • Prepare overall scenario for the feast for the two days • Organize a discothèque on Saturday night • Re-create the tradition Caroling for the official guests during the cocktail 	end of September	Initiative Group
	Mid October	Nanko, municipality
	20 September	Svetla
	End of September	Svetla
	31 July	Svetla
	5 September	Svetla, Working group
	during the celebration during the celebration	Cultural house (Chitalishte) Group Leader Hristo Shopov, Svetla

Working groups:

1. Organize the Crafts Fair – Velichka, Lucy, and others invited by them;
2. Review accommodation facilities – Dobrinka Tsutsova, Donka Kojeikova, etc.;
3. Catering provision group – Liliana Djondjorova, Zlatka, etc.
4. Group working with children on the sports events, Q&A, and exhibition - Liliana Paralingova, Svetla, etc;
5. Group for preparing attractions in the mountains, trails and transport arrangements – Toncho, Lalio, Todor, Ivan, Donna Ivanova;
6. Public relations and advertising – Nanko, Georgi Filipov, Tzvetana, Donka Kojeikova, Ivan Doktorski;
7. Preparation of cultural events - Svetla;
8. Improvements to the town (cleaning the river bank, monuments, and streets) - Mayor of Kalofer, Donna Ivanova, Nanko.

Appendix 2.7

Strategic Plan Ecotourism Association Rila August 2002

Vision of Ecotourism Association Rila

“We believe that in 7 years members of **Ecotourism Association Rila** will have more prosperous and steady businesses and clear mechanisms for partnerships with Rila National Park and the local authorities. Local authorities will become active partners in ecotourism development.

The ecotourist product of the Association will be a well-established trademark of high quality and it will have a stable market share in the country and abroad.

We shall attract new partners from the local communities and create opportunities for new jobs. We shall enhance the eco-awareness of young people.”

Mission of Ecotourism Association Rila

“Environmental protection, sustainable ecotourism, and environment friendly livelihoods for local communities”

Analysis of Interactions

- **CLIENTS**

- families with children
 - nature lovers
 - elderly people who are retired
 - groups of friends
 - young people in business
 - companies interested in personnel training
 - 8 to 18 year-old students
 - people with professional interests in nature
 - artists
 - sportsmen

- **FOLLOWERS**

- some in the local community
 - teachers
 - nature lovers
 - sponsors
 - local authority representatives
 - Ecotourism Association Rila

- **PARTNERS**

Rila National Park
ARD
Ecotourism Association Central Balkan – Kalofer
Craftsmen community
the Museum and other cultural sites in Samokov,
Children of the Earth

- **SYMPATHIZERS**

Tourism Council Samokov

- **OPPONENTS**

Ecotourism Association Beli Iskar
some in the local community, i.e. poachers
people interested in buying local community property

- **COMPETITORS**

Ecotourism association Beli Iskar
Borovetz resort (at present)

Analysis of association environment

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organization exists • Confidence among Association members • New area of business • Good public image • Increased impact opportunities • No competitive associations in the region • Association members are in business and are professionals • Unique product to offer • Ability to establish own trademark 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to increase professional skills and qualification • Insufficient work with the municipality • Product should be developed and enriched • Lack of proactive development • Lack of marketing strategy • There are no common standards for quality of product • Lack of tourist information services • Lack of good system for communications among Association members • Lack of reservation and booking system • Lack of media strategy • Functions and roles of association members are not defined (lack of experience in team-building within the organization)

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no competition in the region • ecotourism has considerable potential market in the country • involvement in programs and projects • support of BCEG Project • support of partnerships established among followers of the Association • Association works within the framework of a unique pilot project in Bulgaria • national regulations set up a favorable environment for the product of the Association (in terms of protected areas) • media in Samokov is acquainted with Association activities and are cooperative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no competition in the region • funding by outside programs and projects may lead to financial dependence • Lack of ecological culture among most representatives of local community • bad state of infrastructure • lack of concern on the part of local authorities • uncontrolled tourist flow

1. NATURE CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF PARTNERSHIP WITH RILA NATIONAL PARK

- 1.1. Develop Calendar of Events associated with the Park.
- 1.2. Establish special place for conducting events in the Park.
- 1.3. Develop an educational program for the schools in the area of the municipality.

2. IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF THE ASSOCIATION'S ECOTOURIST PRODUCT

- 2.1. Improve the qualifications of those working in the area of ecotourism.
- 2.2. Work out pricing policy
- 2.3. Establish a control system
- 2.4. Enrich and develop Association products

3. DEVELOP PARTNERSHIPS

- 3.1. Promote Association activities through the media
- 3.2. Develop a program for cooperation with the municipality of Samokov
- 3.3. Establish partnerships and networks with similar organizations

4. DEVELOP THE INFORMATIONAL RESOURCES OF THE ASSOCIATION

- 4.1. Set up information centers in Samokov and the villages
- 4.2. Develop tourist information services

5.CREATE AND DEVELOP SALES SYSTEM FOR ASSOCIATION PRODUCTS

- 5.1. Develop marketing strategy
- 5.2. Register and establish Association's trademark.
- 5.3. Conduct market research and register a tour operator company for the Association.
- 5.4. Develop a booking system.
- 5.5. Disseminate advertising materials.
- 5.6. Develop a data base of clients.

6.DEVELOP AN ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AMONG ASSOCIATION MEMBERS

- 6.1.Develop Association project policies
- 6.2.Improve the qualifications of Association members
- 6.3. Develop Association documentation

Action plans*Action plan**Strategy 6.1. "Develop Association project policies"*

ACTIVITIES	TERMS	PERSON IN CHARGE	RESOURCES NEEDED
2.1.Conduct training on project development	August 02.	Nikolai Jambazky	
2.2.Identify and agree on priority issues	End of September 2002	Management Board	
2.3.Identify strategic partners for developing projects and inform them of the Association's interest in cooperative work	20.8.2002	Dimiter Peev Nikolai Jambazky	

*Action Plan**Strategy 6.2.: “Improve the Qualifications of Association members”*

ACTIVITIES	TERMS	PERSON IN CHARGE	RESOURCES NEEDED
1.1.Meet to identify needs for improving organizational culture	Sunday 4 August 2002r	Emilia Borisova Nikolai Jambazky	
1.2.Prepare a questionnaire to explore the needs for training and development	20.8.02r.	Nelly Georgieva	
1.3.Analyze and summarize questionnaires results	10.9.02r.	Emilia Borisova Nikolai Jambazky	
1.4.Survey organization and submit materials for work with the organization	20.8.02r.	Emilia Borisova	
1.5.Training program	End of September	Emilia Borisova Nikolai Jambazky Emilia Konyarska	
1.6.Survey consultants who are able to conduct the training program	Permanent	Nikolai Jambazky	
1.7.Elaborate program for exchange of experiences with other organizations	15.12.02.	Emilia Borisova Nikolai Jambazky	

*Action plan**Strategy 6.3.: "Develop Association documentation"*

ACTIVITIES	TERMS	PERSON IN CHARGE	RESOURCES NEEDED
3.1. Develop all necessary documentation for the Association <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • membership book • membership fees book • cash book 	End of September 2002	Emilia Borisova Nikolai Jambazky Krazy Runtov	
3.2. Determine system for keeping books and handling correspondence and mail			
3.3. Develop data base			
3.4. Maintain donation book			
3.5. Prepare book of honorable members			
3.6. Establish procedures for relations among Association members	End of September 2002	Management Board	

Appendix 2.8

Strategic Plan Ecotourism Association Central Balkan – Kalofer August 2002

Vision

“We are convinced that in six years Kalofer will become a resort place of national relevance, visited annually by 6 000 tourists. We anticipate that 30% of the town’s population will become members of the Association, and that many Kalofer citizens who have left the town will come back to live in a clean and beautiful place. We will do our best to conserve nature and make Kalofer traditions and crafts part of the Association’s product.”

Mission

“The mission of Ecotourism Association Central Balkan–Kalofer is the renovation, conservation, and development of Kalofer by using nature in a friendly and sensible way”

Stakeholders

Clients: Nature lovers, adventures seekers, patriots, people in the arts tired of their urban surrounding, people keen on religion and beliefs, foreigners such as nature lovers, specialists – biologists, ornithologists, mountain climbers, and photographers.

Partners: Central Balkan National Park, the municipality, the school, the local museum, the day-care center, churches, the BCEG Project, craftsmen, the Foundation for Young Ecologists, the Club Friends to the Park, TD Haidut, the Employment bureau, Karlovo, the Ecotourism Association-Rila, and the Association Ribaritzia.

Sympathizers: Pensioners’ Club, Association Kalofer Friendship – Sofia.

Followers: Veterans’ Tourist Club, Information Center Karlovo, Nature Fund, George Washington University, University of Tennessee, the Anglo-American School – Sofia, the Church community of Leenen – Germany, and the Eco-program, Drezden, Germany.

Opponents: A/ **passive** – people within the local community who are not convinced of the goals of the Association

B/ **active**

Competitors: “We don’t have sufficient experience in the field in order to identify who are our competitors.”

Analysis of environment

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Good team - Good interrelations - Enthusiasm among Association members - Mutual support - Loyalty - The Association gives its members a specific public image - Experience in joint activities in offering ecotourist product - Information Center 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Insufficient qualification in the professional hosting field - No internal rules and standard of services - No transport company available as part of the Association - Rules regulating interrelations between the association members are not defined - Internal regulations of the association are not formulated - Rules for contacts with the media /social environment are not specified - No trademark - Roles and functions related to association's activities are not defined - The product is not always of good quality - Mechanisms for offering product are not fully developed - No strategy for promotion and marketing - No strategy for working with local authorities
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Good partnership with the management of Central Balkan National Park - Good partnership with the municipality of Kalofer - The Association is located in a town that is an entry point to the Park - Conserved and unique nature exists - The new law on NGOs permits economic activities of this type - Opportunity to manage a beautiful building and turn it into an Information Center for a period of 10 years. - Good contacts with Germany - Mineral water hot springs in close proximity to the town - Involved in a pilot project for Bulgaria and receiving technical assistance - Opportunity to become local tour operator - Established first contacts with tour operators. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Poor relations with the municipality of Karlovo - Poor infrastructure in the town: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -old water supply system -poor conditions of roads of the town -some discharge of sewage into the river - No access to Internet - Irregular collection of town wastes - No defined strategy for equipping and managing the Information Center - Lack of concern on the part of local community to keep the town clean - Lack of information services for tourists.

Goals and Strategies

1. Promoting and marketing the Association's products

- Increase in the information resources of the Association, i.e. leaflets and an Internet page
- Develop and establish a trademark
- Develop a strategy for managing a destination and becoming a tour operator

2. Increase the product quality and diversity

- Increase members' qualification;
- Restore and update traditions and customs
- Develop and reinforce Association's standards
- Agree on the internal rules of the Association
- Develop project policies.

3. Conservation of nature and partnership with Park management

- Develop joint educational programs
- Prepare a curriculum for the so called green schools
- Establish formal procedures for relations with the Park management.

4. Set up and operate Information Center

- Prepare strategy and action plan for the Information Center
- Develop a proposal for the start up of the Information Center
- Develop a communication system for the Information Center.

5. Develop partnerships with:

- Local communities;
- Local authorities and institutions;
- Similar organizations

Action plans

Objective 2, Strategy 1: “Improve the Qualifications of Association Members

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Time terms</i>	<i>Person in charge</i>
1. Theoretical training - lectures, training courses on different type of services, video-film aids, and photographs	6 months	Dobrinka Tz.
2. Practical training – sharing of experiences with similar organizations, NGOs, and partners	6 months	Mitko
3. Self-training – educational aids, shared experience, personal contacts	On-going	Everyone for themselves
4. Identify training needs	Working meeting Sept. 2002	Donna Ivanova
5. Explore institutions that offer training	Working meeting Sept. 2002	Donna Ivanova
6. Identify donor programs that could support qualification training courses	On-going	Lalyo Ganchev

Objective 2, Strategy 2: “Renovate and Update Local Traditions and Customs”

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Time terms</i>	<i>Person in charge</i>
1. Holidays – Christmas, Easter, the First Sunday before Lent, St. George day, et.	As per calendar	Members of Ecotourist Association Central Balkan-Kalofer
2. Produce a video film of each of the holidays’ activities	One-year period	Working group and Nanko
3. Invite guests on various holiday occasions: - Traditional dishes offered on holidays - Traditional dishes included on the menu of local dining places - Organize and produce traditional clothes and materials (folklore rags, woven socks, cotton shirts)	On calendar dates	Naydenova
4. Compile an ethnographic collection and provide a permanent show-room	Two years	Naydenova
5. Restore the Roman Bath as an attraction	One year	Naydenova
6. Organize a permanent show-	At the opening of	Naydenova

room/shopping place with the opening of the Information Center	the Information Center	
7. Attract craftsmen to Ecotourism Association Central Balkan-Kalofer	permanent	Working group
8. Renovate the water-mill site, including the bakery and fuller-mill; Preparation work on the site renovation project	Within 6-year period	Hr. Ganova
9. Renovate quadrant 55 between the two bridges	Within 6-year period	L.Ganchev
10. Organize a show-room for tasting local milk products	March 2003	L.Ganchev T.Tonchev

Objective 2, Strategy 3: “Develop and Establish Association’s Standards”

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Time terms</i>	<i>Person in charge</i>
1. Obtain: Standards from similar organizations Standards applied in US organizations Tourism Act regulations BAAT Recommendations of American probationers	November 2002	Working group ARD Dobrinka Tz.
2. Hold discussion with Association members and agree on final standards	Jan. 2003	ETA Central Balkan – Kalofer Working group
3. Define internal rules and their compliance with the Ecotourism Association Central Balkan regulations and the Tourism Act	February 2003	Working group
4. Vote of approval by the General Assembly of the Association	2 March 2002	Secretary
5. Control by Association members of standards implementation	Every two years till completion of 6-year period	ETA Central Balkan committee
6. Update and discuss standards	On regular basis within 6-year period	Members of ETA Central Balkan

Objective 2, Strategy 4: “ Develop Statutes for the Association”

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Time terms</i>	<i>Person in charge</i>
1. Organize a work meeting with all members of the Association	October- November 2002	Toshko, Mitko
1.1. Provide information in advance on legal regulations, etc.	15 Sept. 2002	Donka
1.2. Approve internal rules	Jan. 2003	

Appendix 3.1

Self-Assessment of the Rila Ecotourism Initiative Group-Samokov on Organizing and Conducting the Event for the Official Opening of the Entry Infrastructure of Rila National Park 6-7 October 2002

This self-assessment was made by the Initiative Group on 9 October 2002 and reflects the opinion of 15 members of the Group. It includes an analysis of the following issues:

- Achievements from the preparation and conduct of the event
- Challenges
- Opportunities for future activities

Achievements from the preparation and conduct of the event were viewed by Initiative Group members as an opportunity to get acquainted with each other and work together. This success resulted in commitments to plan future activities. The group admitted that its members are not professionals on mass events; nevertheless with technical assistance from the BCEG Project, they succeeded in organizing this event. They have begun something new in Samokov municipality, something that has animated the general public's consciousness and created a new attitude towards the Park.

The event in Malyovitsa triggered an interest in ecotourism by a lot of people in the region. Many local people called the Information Centers. This showed the Group it could do promotional work.

The event turned out to be a festive event for the local community and representatives of the municipality who attended. The good program, children games, and exhibition of crafts contributed to high spirits in adults and children alike.

Extra transport was timely organized. The event served as a test for selling children's attractions. Thanks to the efforts of Kamelia Georgieva of the BCED Project, sales of games for children were done with the organizational support of local teachers.

The media covered the event and a local cable operator produced a film on it. The event served as an opportunity to enrich personal experiences and as a basis for analyzing mistakes. As a consequence of the experience Group members obtained from this event, attitudes towards seeking funding sources has changed and is no longer seen as an act of begging.

Challenges facing the Initiative Group are associated mainly with the lack of organizational skills. Opportunities offered for visitors seem not to have been announced explicitly, hence horse rides and hiking the mountain trails were done mainly by foreign citizens who happened to have read the ads brochure closely. The Group is aware of the fact that there is no propensity for advance booking or payment among Bulgarians.

During the event, group members were scattered around so guests were not easily able to identify them as hosts of the event.

In relation to the event location, Malyovitsa, there were some conflicts among some of the business interests. Some people were trusted to deliver on their promises but, in some cases, individual business interests came first.

The program was changed at the last moment and this was disappointing to some of the participants. For local people the event was a chance to express themselves publicly. The program started late because some of the official guests arrived rather late.

One of the great challenges proved to be the fact that the Initiative Group became the main sponsor of the event. There were other sponsorships, too, but group members actually provided the funding for a considerable part of the event - transport, food and drinks for the children and participants in the program.

Opportunities for future activities, as viewed by the group

The event has led Initiative Group members to conclude that all their activities have to be regulated. A signage system has to be developed identifying the product of the group as different from the others' products. Thus accommodation providers with the Park label will be given priority. It is important to organize events related to Rila National Park in the future, too.

The system of mutual communication should be improved, as well as the activity of the Information Center. Good communications with accommodation places and guides have to be established. The informational materials should include maps with locations of accommodation places, crafts, and landmarks. The promotion campaign should start earlier and public relation should be improved.

The event in Malyovitsa demonstrated that children-oriented services can be marketed successfully, therefore the Group considered that they could attract children by organizing kindergarten and green school programs.

The group can work on a better presentation of its ecotourism products and services, both in advance and during the event. Such an event can be carried out on regular basis.

Appendix 3.2

Self-assessment of the Central Balkan Initiative Ecotourism Group-Kalofer On Organizing the Birthday Celebration for the Central Balkan National Park 20-21 October 2002

This self-assessment was made on 24 Oct. 2001 by 7 members of Central Balkan Ecotourism Initiative Group-Kalofer. The Group organized a special event to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Central Balkan National Park. This assessment includes:

- Analysis of achievements;
- Analysis of challenges;
- Opportunities for development

Members of the Ecotourism Initiative Group-Kalofer viewed as **achievements** the support of municipality Karlovo, which provided for the equipment of the event and the sponsorship of Coca-Cola. The media was also supportive.

The event was better organized than similar events on Park anniversaries. It took place in an atmosphere of high spirits for both participants and guests. The art crafts exhibition invoked a great deal of public. Tourists who attended the event showed interest in the Park trails planned for next year.

Challenges are rooted in the insufficient participation of some members of the Initiative Group, as well as poor allocation of duties. Advertising brochures were insufficient and failed to reach all the villages around Kalofer.

The difficulty in accommodating official guests was due to inadequate accommodation facilities. At the last moment some of the private lodgings providers refused to accommodate the guests as promised. At the same time there was no confirmation of bookings made in advance.

The Initiative Group did not manage to attract enough people from the local community to help in preparing for the event. The mayor of Kalofer did not keep his promise to cooperate in organizing refreshments and food at Byala Reka and this inconvenienced the guests. The attractions were not properly promoted, while the program for opening the event was not well coordinated with Park Management.

Opportunities for development are promotion of the Groups' goals and objectives for ecotourism among the local people and public information on the Groups' efforts. An important part of future activities will be improving interaction with the mayor of Kalofer.

Appendix 3.3

Self-assessment of the Rila Ecotourism Initiative Group-Samokov

12 March 2002

This self-assessment was initiated due to tension within the Group participants and a crisis in confidence. It included an open process of sharing successes and difficulties on the current joint group activities.

Joint group activities are considered to be **successful** by Initiative Group members when the Group, on the whole, has good communication and a good match of interests among the various professionals. The Initiative Group succeeded in popularizing ecotourism in the municipality of Samokov – in the town and villages alike, as well as publicizing the Park's conservation and nature protection values.

As a result of joint activities, new ideas arose and were carried out, new members were attracted to the Group, and the Group got the attention of local and governmental institutions. This increased opportunities for economic development of the region and attracting investments.

Interactions in an organized group have provided participants with increased competence in the area of tourism, as well as new knowledge and skills as a result of training and consultations received from the BCEG Project. This has allowed a member of the Group to develop a successful business plan and apply successfully for bank credit. All members of the Initiative Group have increased their awareness of current trends and opportunities for in developing ecotourism.

The group has reached this basic agreement in spite of some members' contradictory views related to institutionalizing and establishing an association. Common activities have attracted the attention of tour operators and other businesses.

There are more opportunities for communication with Rila National Park on their intentions in the area of ecotourism. The Group can have more impact on the Park's management plan.

Occasional **difficulties** arose during joint activities leading to some crisis situations. These difficulties are rather inconsequential to the overall economic crisis in the country, and tended to make people more impatient and there was inefficient allocation of responsibilities and tasks.

The Initiative Group is of the opinion that the region is not promoted enough by national television and this has not had a positive effect on attracting clients.

Municipal authorities have declared their intentions to cooperate but in practice communication with them is rather difficult. Members of the Group seemed not to be well acquainted with the Park management plan.

Appendix 4**List of Issues Identified by the Participants
in the Training Workshop on Project Preparation
31 July – 1 August 2002.**

From July 31, until the 1 August 2002, representatives of the Ecotourism Associations Rila and Central Balkan-Kalofer participated in a joint working meeting on project preparation and planning. In the training part of the meeting, the concept of the project was presented as an opportunity for problem solving. *The participants defined the following issues as affecting the Associations' development:*

- Qualifications of personnel
- Lack of tourist information infrastructure, road infrastructure and communication facilities
- Lack of good relations with the local authorities
- Poor advertising of the product
- Lack of Internet page
- Insufficient capacity of the product, particularly accommodation facilities and publicity of attractions
- Lack of appreciation for the value of nature among most of the people from the settlements around the parks
- Pollution by local people and tourists
- Lack of marketing channels and a tour-operator offering the ecotourism product
- Insufficient information in the local communities about the Associations and the opportunities ecotourism provides.

The following priority issues were defined:

- Qualification of the people
- Developing tourist information structure
- Links with local authorities
- Marketing and advertising of the product
- Developing capacity of the settlements

Appendix 5.1

Summary of the First Joint Project of the Ecotourism Associations Rila and Central Balkan – Kalofer Developed in August 2002 for World Learning Program

The Project Assist to Nature and Yourself is a partner project between the two Associations and was developed after a lengthy analysis of the most important issues related to achieving our goals. The *qualifications of the Associations' members in offering the ecotourism product* and the requirement to *increase the local communities' interest and the understanding of ecotourism* were identified as priorities.

Improving links with the local people is of key importance. At this stage of development we need to receive hospitality training, since we are the best examples of how to do things right for other people in the community.

The main goal of this project is to improve the understanding of ecotourism in the local communities in the regions of Samokov and Kalofer and to increase the interest of the local people in this form of economic growth.

The Project objectives are to:

1. Create opportunities to attract new adherents;
2. Develop the skills of the Ecotourism Associations' members to offer quality ecotourism services by a personal example.

Activities:

The project envisages the carrying of two training modules on hospitality management; publication of educational materials on ecotourism designed for local people; preparation and publication of an Ecotourism Entrepreneur's Manual, and the conduct of public meetings in the settlements included in the BCEG Ecotourism pilot project.

Appendix 5.2

Summary of a Project of the Ecotourism Association Rila-Samokov Developed for the Innovative Projects Contest October 2002.

The project *“In Peace with Nature - Improving the Opportunities for Contacts with It”* is planned to be carried for a period of one year, with a budget of 48 800 leva.

The expected result of the project is an ecological cycling, designed for amateur mountain biking tourists. It will be created as alternative form of ecotourism and at the same time will help regulate the flow of biking tourists within the Rila National Park territory.

The project envisages research and planning activities for the development of a specialized trail for cycling tourists; securing the track; construction and dislocation of specialized infrastructure; organizing and running a National Mountain Biking Championship, and preparation and production of advertising materials. The project will also establish ground for a Friends of Nature and the Park Fund.

Appendix 5.3**Summary of a Ecotourism Association Central Balkan – Kalofer Project
developed for the
Innovative Projects Contest
October 2002.**

The Project “*Center for Conservation Education and Survival among Nature*” will be carried out for a period of seven months and envisages a budget of 38 800 leva.

The project is based on developing training opportunities in the park and creating opportunities to generate new income for the local community.

The project will design and develop a bivouac in the Central Balkan National Park territory; equip a presentations hall; produce educational and advertising materials, and train trainers and develop the curriculum for the Survival among Nature educational program.

Appendix 6.1

Ecotourism Association Rila court decision

SOFIA District COURT
Company Case 649/ 2002
SOFIA

DECISION Nr. 1
SOFIA, 02.09.2002

WE THE PEOPLE

Sofia District Court , Company Department, on a closed session on the 02.09.2002, constituted of:
Chairman: I. Doycheva

reviewed company case Nr. 649/2002 and in order to pronounce its decision, had taken into consideration the following.

The case is within the order set by article 489 of the Civil Procession Code, based on Art. 6, 17 and 18 of the Law on Non-Profit Entities (SG 81/ 06.10.2000).

A court case has been called upon the request of the MB of Association named **Rila Ecotourism Association** to enlist it in the special court register of the Non-profit organizations. Of written proofs the collected for the case, the court accepts for set the following legal and factual situation:

With a protocol is set certified the conduction of founder's meeting of the association, with which unanimous decision was taken for the establishment of a legal entity with non-profit purpose – an association for performance of activities with public benefit; for the acceptance of code; for the selection of managing organs.

Based upon the results out of these written proofs, the court has drawn the following conclusions:

The request is justified and must be observed.

Available is a valid decision for the establishment of a legal non-for profit entity, founded by 15 individuals. The given name shall be accepted and enlisted in this word expression, since it does not coincide with the name of other organization, enlisted up to the present moment - art. 7 of the NPE Law. The code of the association contains regulations regarding required for the enlisting circumstances, listed in articles 16 and 20 of the law. The objectives, which the association sets before, are defining it as public benefit organization. The objectives are not restricted by the Laws and the Constitution of the country.

Due to all, since all required circumstances for enlistment are available, and after the court accepted, that their enlisting is allowed, based on article 496 of the Civil Code, and in relation with art. 6, par. 1 and art. 19 of the NPE Law.

The Sofia District Court

DECIDED

Appendix 6.2

Ecotourism Association Central Balkan – Kalofer court decision

DECISION Nr. 5111
Plovdiv, 03.09.2002

WE THE PEOPLE

Plovdiv District Court, Company Department, on its session on 2002 constituted of:

District Judge: V. Ivanova

Company case Nr: 2019, of the 2002 register.

A court case has been called upon the request of the Chairman of Association named **Central Balkan – Kalofer Ecotourism Association, Kalofer, 2, Hristo Botev str.** to enlist it in the special court register of the non-profit organizations.

The district court, bearing in mind that according to article 18 of the Law for Non-Profit Organizations Entities (SG 81/06.10.2000), and article 489 of the Civil Code, the written proofs collected for the case, the court accepts for set the following legal and factual situation. The request is justified and must be observed. Attached are the documents, required for the enlistment circumstances, and namely: Protocol, set to certify the conduction of the meeting; 2. List of the association founders; 3. Protocol of the MB of the Association; 5. List of MB members; 6. Copies of the ID cards of the MB members; 7. Court Certification of the MB; 8. Certificate for the originality of the name; 9. Paid governmental fee.

Based upon the above, the court:

DECIDED

To enlists in the Non-for profit register of the Plovdiv District Court, base on the results out of these written proofs, the non-profit association “**Central Balkan Ecotourism Association - Kalofer**”, with headquarters – Kalofer, 2 Hristo Botev str. The objective of the association – public benefit activities, which is aimed at assisting with legal means the complex development of the ecotourism in the town of Kalofer and the region. Coordinates the interests and activates the actions of organs, associations and companies, related to the Kalofer ecotourism development, as it assists to the tourism at a local level, stimulates the private initiative, coordinates and regulates the interrelations in the establishment of a local tourism policy, as part of the national policy.

Ensures unity and coordination of the intentions of the tourist entities in the formation and realization of the marketing activities and the development of tourist products.

In partnership with Central Balkan NPD, works for communication and conservation of nature.

The means for the achievement of the association’s objective are:

- 1. Membership fee**
- 2. Funds provided for the implementation of programs and projects**
- 3. Donations**
- 4. Interests**
- 5. Other sources defined by the law**